

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 20, 2013

The Honorable Daniel M. Ashe
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Ashe:

We write today to request a 60 day extension of the comment solicitation period and a six-month extension of any final decision on the proposal by the Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) to list the Lesser Prairie Chicken as a threatened species. Our constituents and others throughout the Lesser Prairie Chicken's five-state range have expressed an eagerness to participate in this comment period ahead of any final determination, which under the settlement with environmental groups must be made by March 30, 2014, provided the Service exercises its option to delay a final decision by six months. The Service has the discretionary authority to extend the determination date so it can fully and appropriately examine the still developing science underlying a decision, which we believe is warranted.

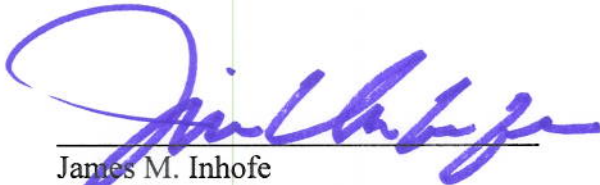
An extension of the comment period is necessary because the five states' wildlife agencies are working hard to finalize and submit a range-wide conservation plan to the Service by mid-March which is the same time as the comment period otherwise would end. The 60 day extension would also allow those state agencies time to evaluate and incorporate into their plan the comments to the Service's proposal offered at the series of public meetings that are currently underway. Since the state wildlife agencies possess an established repository of knowledge on how best to protect the Lesser Prairie Chicken, allowing them time to finish their range-wide plan and then to submit the most comprehensive comments on the Service's proposal would appear to advance the Service's interest in making the most scientifically-based decision in this matter. We further understand that this 60 day extension will allow the states to complete this spring's aerial population survey, which is conducted in the month of April.

In addition, an extension of the comment period will provide time for Service approval of Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA) for ranching and the oil and gas industries, among others, and facilitate the enrollment of sufficient acreage under those CCAAs to demonstrate a scientifically sound basis for a "not warranted" decision in this matter. These initiatives have been noted by the Service as critically important to encouraging the kind of voluntary conservation activity among state officials and the private sector that is required to protect a species and its habitat. We appreciate and are encouraged by the actions the Service has recently taken to dialogue with the five state fish and wildlife agencies about the range-wide oil and gas CCAAs. We strongly support that process and trust that this good faith collaboration will continue toward FWS's expeditious approval of oil and gas CCAAs.

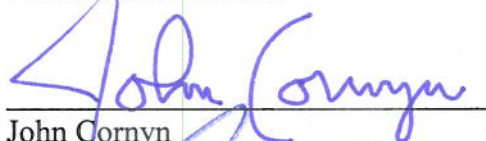
The outcome of this listing proposal is vitally important to many sectors in the local economies of our states, including agriculture; oil and gas development; ranching; transportation; and wind energy. Listing the Lesser Prairie Chicken under the Endangered Species Act would negatively impact these sectors for many years to come. With this in mind, and knowing that conservation efforts are ongoing and that the science evaluating the status of the species is still developing, it is imperative to provide sufficient time to evaluate the true health of the species rather than simply hold fast to arbitrary court-mandated deadlines that do not account for ongoing species recovery developments. The settlement provides the option to delay a final decision for six months beyond September 30, 2013; we therefore urge the Service to avail itself of this opportunity to arrive at the best decision in this matter.

Your consideration of these requests is appreciated, and we look forward to your response.

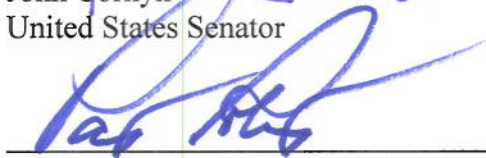
Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Pat Roberts
United States Senator



Tom Coburn
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
United States Senator